

## Hometown Proximity, Coaching Change, and the Success of College Basketball Recruits

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In this study, we examine the influence of hometown proximity on collegiate athletic recruit performance. The geographic proximity of a new recruit's local community to a recruiting organization can influence the recruit's performance after joining an organization. However, the direction of the effect of such proximity is not clear. Previous research suggests that human resource proximity facilitates recruits' social embeddedness in the community in and around the recruiting organization. In turn, proximity may increase recruit performance by facilitating learning, trust-building, and social commitment. However, prior research also suggests that proximity could have some negative influences. Our empirical analysis of collegiate basketball recruits suggests that the geographic proximity of an organization to a new recruit's hometown generally has a positive influence on both individual and team performance. However, proximity may become a disadvantage when there is a disruptive, involuntary coaching change after the recruit joins the organization.

Each year, thousands of high school student-athletes make decisions about where to attend college. These are important decisions for both the athletes and the colleges they attend. For recruits, the decision can have important career implications. Indeed, career success varies across collegiate institutions for both students and athletes (Sukup, 2012; Weissmann, 2012). For colleges, the success of American collegiate athletics programs, which generate millions of dollars in annual revenues, depends heavily on winning, and winning depends heavily on being able to attract talented student-athletes. Consequently, recruiting can be very competitive, particularly in revenue-generating sports at National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I schools where large portions of athletic department funds are allocated to recruiting top athletes (Croft, 2008; Funk, 1991).

In making the major life decision of where to attend college, student-athletes must weigh a number of pros and cons. One key factor in recruits' college decisions is the location of the school, particularly in reference

to recruits' hometowns (Cooper, 1996; Doyle & Gaeth, 1990; Dumond, Lynch & Platania, 2008; Fizek & Bennett, 1996). Advances in communication and transportation technologies represent opportunities to upgrade talent by geographically expanding pools of recruits (e.g., Fernandez-Araoz, Groyberg & Nohria, 2009), but recruiting across larger distances may come at a cost. Indeed, coaches, fans, players, administrators and analysts recognize the potential relevance of recruits' geographic location (Bean, 2008). In interviews of Division I football, Klenosky, Templin and Troutman (2001) found that being close to home helped players feel greater sense of achievement and satisfaction. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some sport organizations (e.g., Atlanta Braves, University of Washington Huskies) have made significant efforts to develop and recruit local talent (Kelley, 2010; Newberry, 2005). However, no research has carefully addressed the question of how geographic locality influences the performance of new recruits. With this study, we examine the influence of hometown proximity, defined as the geographic distance between an organization and recruits' local communities, on the performance of new recruits and their athletics programs.

From a broader academic standpoint, the question of how hometown proximity influences recruit performance is important for two reasons. First, despite calls for more research on the influences of recruit sources (e.g., Capelli,

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2001; Kirnan, Farley & Geisenger, 1989; Rao & Drazin, 2002; Williams, Labig & Stone, 1993) and work environment (Feldman, 1981; Morrison, 2002; Wellins & Rioux, 2000), the influence of geographic proximity on human resource performance remains largely unexamined. In the social-psychology and geographic sociology literatures, research on interpersonal propinquity (e.g., Barnlund & Harland, 1963, Fayard & Weeks, 2007) and interorganizational agglomeration (e.g., Marshall, 1920, McCann & Folta, 2008; Whittington, Owen-Smith & Powell, 2009) suggest meaningful effects of geographic proximity at different levels of analysis. The classic Hotelling model (Hotelling, 1929) has been explicitly and implicitly used to describe the influence of geographic distance-related costs on consumer-organization exchange behavior (e.g., Frenette, 2004). However, outside of the sport management literature, no research attempts to explain the influences of hometown proximity on person-organization employment exchanges.

Within the sport management and collegiate literature, the role of geographic proximity in human resource management has been examined to a greater degree. Research has shown that collegiate recruits are more likely to choose local universities (Dumond et al., 2008), and that teams and individual athletes tend to enjoy a “home court” advantage during competition (Bray & Martin, 2003). However, questions about the influence of hometown proximity on recruit performance remain unaddressed. Consequently, we believe this study not only offers insights to the sport management literature; it also represents an opportunity for the sport management literature to make a significant contribution to the broader social-psychology and economics literatures.

Second, the way proximity influences recruit performance is not clear. Hometown proximity should positively influence recruit and organization performance because it lowers the recruit’s costs of forming and maintaining relations inside and outside of the organization. In turn, relationship-building in and around the organization has been linked to effective socialization of new recruits by numerous studies (e.g., Cable & Parsons, 2001; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 2006). However, other research suggests that there may be costs associated with excessively strong relations engendered by hometown proximity, including distractions from task requirements (Granovetter, 1973), excessive trust-building (Wicks, Berman & Jones, 1999), and nepotism (Khatri & Tsang, 2003). Given these countervailing forces, recruits and leaders have no universally prescriptive solution to the question of the effects of recruits’ hometown proximity on their performance.

We therefore suggest that the development of a contingency approach may be appropriate. The effects of hometown proximity may depend on the stability of important relationships around a recruit. Leaders, such as athletic coaches, serve as important organization boundary spanners (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve & Tsai, 2004; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003) and symbols (Leavy, 1996) for recruits. For example, Klenosky et al. (2001) found that collegiate athletics recruits most

frequently cited the coach and coaching staff a reason for choosing a particular school. Similarly, Croft (2008) reports the relationship with the head coach as the most prominent school-choice factor for NCAA basketball recruits. Thus, we examine the moderating effect of involuntary leadership change because such change could negate the positive effects of proximity on individual and organization performance.

We test our hypotheses by analyzing data on NCAA Division I collegiate basketball recruits. Using four regression models, we examine how hometown proximity influences individual performance statistics, National Basketball Association (NBA) draft status, and team performance. Taken together, these analyses tell a compelling story of how hometown proximity influences individual recruit and team performance, and open a new avenue of research on the study of recruit sources and prehire variables (Breauh & Starke, 2000; Rynes, 1991). Consequently, this study offers important theoretical and practical lessons about the selection and development of new recruits.

## Hypothesis Development

Based on research in other areas, social capital may be the primary mechanism by which hometown proximity influences recruit performance. Social capital refers to the way that an actor’s embeddedness in the structure and content of social relations affects that actor’s performance (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Hometown proximity should influence recruit performance by strengthening recruits’ relational and structural embeddedness in and around the organizations that they join. By facilitating interpersonal relations, hometown proximity should influence the mechanisms of embeddedness—learning, trust-building, and social commitment (Barden & Mitchell, 2007). We know that spatial proximity enhances interpersonal information sharing by lowering the costs of direct interaction (Davis, 1984; Keller & Holland, 1983) and indirect interaction through third parties both on- and off-the-job (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Lee, Mitchell, Sablinski, Burton & Holtom, 2004). Proximity is also a particularly influential determinant of information sharing when informal communication is instrumental (Fayard & Weeks, 2008) and when parties are dissimilar (Nahemow & Lawton, 1975). In addition to facilitating the transfer of task knowledge through information sharing, proximity also promotes the development of trust (Gossling, 2004) and social commitments such as friendship (Caplow & Forman, 1950). Although these components of recruit socialization may increase performance, some research suggests that many strong relations in and around the workplace can in some cases have dysfunctional effects on performance (Granovetter, 1973; Khatri & Tsang, 2003; Wicks et al., 1999). Given that the effects of hometown proximity on performance could be the product of multiple countervailing forces, a careful examination of the likely mechanisms of such embeddedness is warranted.

## Learning

Proximity facilitates the flow of information between organizations and recruits, which in turn contributes to the recruit's socialization before and after joining an organization (Feldman 1981). Proximity may promote socialization before joining an organization by increasing the number of third party messengers between the organization and recruit. Family, friends, and colleagues may have, for example, relevant information about the organization or the coach that is readily available because they or their friends are affiliated with the same organization. Indeed, applicants referred through current organization members promote exchange of more realistic information about employment opportunities and recruits (Breaugh, 1992, Morrison, 1993; Williams et al., 1993). Higher levels of prehire socialization promote effective posthire socialization, which can facilitate management of outside-life conflicts, role definition, and initiation to the group. Consequently, prehire socialization facilitated by proximity may lead to greater knowledge, satisfaction, motivation, and involvement for the recruits. Knowledge acquired through extraorganizational relationships during socialization may also help organization members to avoid the uncertainty associated with job selection, ultimately allowing organizational entrants to understand and gain influence in their new positions.

Post-hire socialization facilitated by proximity helps ensure congruence of abilities, needs, and values between organizations and their recruits. A complementary fit between a new recruit's abilities and an organization's needs helps ensure that the recruit's value to the organization can be maximized (Arthur, Bell, Villado & Dover-spoke, 2006). Complementarity knowledge acquired through extraorganizational relationships helps coaches or human resource managers tailor tasks and training programs to organization members' strengths. Having extraorganizational relationships available as supplementary communication channels can be particularly valuable in dynamic environments where the organization's and the individual's needs shift (Luo & Chung, 2005). Finally, an extraorganizational communication channel can also be particularly valuable when the norms of communication between an individual and an organization are not well-established.

## Trust

Proximity also influences the success of an employment relationship by facilitating the development of trust—beliefs that exchange partners will competently and honestly honor their obligations to each other. Increased direct communication between organizations and local recruits can foster trust by promoting the development of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960; Settoon, Bennett & Liden, 1996). The greater potential number of exchanges facilitated by geographical proximity allows trust relationships to develop even before recruiting offers are made and accepted (Lewicki, Tomlinson & Gillespie,

2006). Over time, these relationships formed with more experienced coworkers and leaders can develop into mentorships and deeper affective bonds (Bauer, Morrison & Callister, 1998; Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). In addition, relations with common third parties can also enhance trust by enhancing the abilities of the organizations' leaders and recruits to monitor each other (Sheppard & Sherman, 1998). Early trust development offers the benefit of attracting employees (Gould-Williams, 2003) as well as potentially increasing new recruit performance. Trust allows leaders and recruits to accept that their interdependencies are broader than just the on-the-job economic exchange. Consequently new recruits can confidently put maximum effort into completing tasks and developing skills rather than formulating contracts for each transaction and constantly monitoring the actions of significant others.

## Commitment

Proximity increases the likelihood of organization and recruit commitment both before and following employment acceptance. Potential recruits' personal characteristics, expectations, and skills can be better assessed by a coach who has local access to the recruit and his family and friends. Such information can also influence commitment to the recruit after job entry (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982). Hometown proximity helps shape these prehire determinants of commitment because new recruits from the geographic area are more likely to have friends and family who are familiar with the organization's (and coach's) core values and can clarify expectations. The resulting familiarity enhances the affective employment experience. It also increases the utility of feedback, placing committed employees on a higher career trajectory (Lee, Ashford, Walsh & Mowday, 1992).

In addition, proximate friends and family are better positioned to provide social, emotional and economic support to individuals who are employed with a local organization (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Such support may motivate local recruits and help them focus on completing tasks and developing relevant skills. For example, employment close to a home community may reduce work-family tensions by making it easier for a recruit to receive support from family and friends. Friends and family might also bestow legitimacy on a local organization, making employment with that organization a source of pride that positively influences motivation and performance (Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin & Jackson, 1989).

Overall, research suggests that hometown proximity can have a positive influence on recruit performance by engendering learning, trust, and social commitments. However, there are caveats. For example, excessive flows of information from extraorganizational relationships could impede relational learning by distracting recruits and leaders or by overloading their cognitive capacity to process task-related information (Simon,

1955). Trust engendered by proximity could also negatively affect the relationship if one party or the other takes advantage of the vulnerabilities through opportunism or shirking (Wicks et al., 1999). Proximity-enhanced social commitments could lead to cronyism (Khatri & Tsang, 2003) or distractions from employment-related tasks.

In spite of these risks, organization controls likely reinforce the positive relationship between a recruit's hometown proximity and subsequent performance (Ouchi, 1979). Indeed, bureaucratic controls, including codified and uncoded procedural guidelines, can help employers and new employees manage information flow, avoid opportunism, and engender commitment to beneficial organization outcomes. Where employee tasks are more difficult to bureaucratically program, monitor, or enforce, outcome-based incentives and social controls, such as training, leadership, and other recruiting policies, can help minimize potential risks associated with geographically proximate recruiting. Therefore, our first hypothesis reflects the positive influences of proximity on recruits, which can aggregate to the team and organization levels.

*Hypothesis 1. Proximity between a recruit's hometown and workplace increases the recruit's performance and that of the recruit's team.*

Because the facilitation of relations is a central mechanism in the influence of hometown proximity, stability of the key relations that link an organization to its human resources should play a moderating role. Indeed, the positive influences enabled by proximity—knowledge-sharing, trust-building and the development of constructive social commitments—are undermined when the relationship on which they are based is disrupted. We argue that the stability of the relationship between recruits and their coaches is critically important because as leaders, coaches are central actors in the organization (Brass et al., 2004).

The moderating influence of leaders begins in the initial recruitment process (Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). Regular exchange between leaders and subordinates can quickly increase the quality of their relations in a matter of weeks (Nahrgang, Morgeson & Ilies, 2009). Through initial recruitment exchanges, leaders play important roles in shaping the mechanisms that influence recruits (Salam, 2000). When new recruits interact with leaders more, those recruits tend to develop higher commitment (Schieman, 1979), greater satisfaction with their leader (Green, Anderson & Shivers, 1996), stronger value congruence, more supportive relationships (Fairhurst, 1993), and better performance evaluations (Gerstner & Day, 1997). In addition, when recruits view their recruiters as trustworthy and informative, they are more attracted to the job (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin & Jones, 2005). This is especially true when the recruiters are job incumbents or a potential boss. Thus, the beliefs, values

and decisions of leaders have important implications about the ways proximity influences human resource development and performance.

Therefore, changes in leadership, particularly involuntary changes that tend to be more unexpected and disruptive, influence many of the mechanisms of embeddedness that are reinforced by recruits' proximity. An involuntary coaching change can, for example, render the organizational knowledge that organization members and the extraorganizational community accumulate as obsolete (Gilmore 1988). In turn, the resulting increased possibility of miscommunications and misunderstandings might reduce employee performance. Likewise, a change in leadership undermines the knowledge and social bonds that organization members and the extraorganizational communities use to assess the trustworthiness of leaders who act as surrogates for their organizations. Moreover, a change in leadership, particularly an involuntary one, can undermine social commitments—friendships and legitimization—that emerge through repeated interactions between the leader and organization members. If a local recruit has more opportunity to build social expectations of the organization around a relationship with a leader, then a violation of those expectations through an involuntary leadership change could elicit particularly strong negative emotions, distrust and demotivation (Rousseau, 1996). In addition, removal of a trusted and liked intermediary between a recruit and the organization could redirect the local recruit's attention to distracting influences outside of the organization. In sum, without the knowledge, trust and commitment-based benefits of strong relations, the disadvantages of proximity could become more influential. Thus, a leadership change could erase, or even reverse, the positive effects of hometown proximity.

*Hypothesis 2. Involuntary coaching change decreases the positive influence of hometown proximity on performance.*

## Methods

We empirically tested the hypotheses with two sets of analyses. First, we examined the influences of hometown proximity and leadership change on the individual-level performance of 335 high-potential basketball players who joined collegiate NCAA Division I basketball programs from 2002 to 2006. All players in the sample ranked among the top 100 United States prospects according to the Scout Network's basketball recruiting analyst, Dave Telep, and the Prep Stars Recruiting Handbook. The Scout Network and Prep Stars player rankings, which are both highly respected in the basketball scouting community, first concurrently appeared in 2002. Second, we test the hypotheses at the team/organization level by aggregating player data across 50 randomly-selected Division I teams and six years from 2005 to 2011.

## Dependent Variables

Three measures capture individual player performance. Consistency of results across regressions on all three dependent variables constitutes a much stronger hypothesis test.

The first dependent variable is a binary indicator of whether a player is drafted into the NBA. Each year NBA teams draft 60 players. Players drafted into the NBA are assigned a score of 1. Draft status offers two major advantages. Because all college seniors and underclassmen who choose to leave school enter the same NBA draft pool, this measure does not suffer from comparability problems that arise from using game statistics. Collegiate players do not all play against the same level of competition so game statistics can be misleading. In addition, draft status not only reflects easily measured on-court performance, but also reflects less-tangible attributes, such as professionalism, integrity, appeal to basketball fans and defensive skills. We interviewed an NBA scout who confirmed that teams use multiple methods, like interviews of opposing coaches and game videos, to assess such attributes when making draft decisions. For hypothesis testing, we use logistic regression due to the binary nature of draft status.

Given the limitations of using a binary dependent variable, we also use a confirmatory Heckman two-step model to predict reverse draft order. Reversing draft order by subtracting a player's draft number from 61 makes the model directionally consistent. While team-specific needs for certain kinds of players probably influence the draft positions of certain players, such team-specific factors probably do not create systemic bias across multiple drafts. We also address the complexities of considering team-specific needs by including statistical controls for position and height. Normalizing the reverse draft order variable by weighting it with the standard normal continuous distribution function does not substantially alter the results of the Heckman model. Censoring associated with the Heckman correction (i.e., removing undrafted players) reduces the sample to 100. Due to the limited statistical power of the second step of the Heckman regression, we incrementally removed control variables that do not significantly improve the explanatory power of the model.

Finally, we reinforce hypothesis tests at the individual level by using game statistics to measure player performance. We use player efficiency rating (PER) in the last year of players' collegiate career as our game statistics-based measure of performance. Player efficiency rating is a weighted aggregation of standardized game statistics, and is considered the best widely available measure of player performance. Hollinger (2005, pp. 6–10) describes the formula and limitations of PER in detail. The regression on draft status includes three more players ( $N = 335$ ) than the regression on player efficiency rating ( $N = 332$ ) because those three players never accumulated statistics at the Division I level. We

use ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions for the hypothesis tests using game statistics.

At the team level, we use Sagarin ratings to measure performance. The Sagarin method of measuring performance is proprietary, but widely respected for its accuracy and used by the NCAA (West, 2008). Due to the proprietary nature of the Sagarin ratings, we also ran the regression on the Pomeroy ratings, which are also widely respected for their accuracy (Pomeroy, 2011; Silver, 2011), and found no substantial differences in the results of the hypothesis tests.

## Independent Variables

**Hometown Proximity.** Proximity is measured by the distance between a player's college and hometown in miles. This measure offers two advantages. First, high school students tend to be highly connected in their home communities because of their economic dependence on family and their high social interactivity through school and extracurricular sports. Second, because distance is an objective measure, it avoids the reliability and validity problems of self-reports. We use the log of distance because aircraft technology lowers the marginal costs of travel as distance increases. Indeed, the use of the log of distance significantly increases the explanatory power of the statistical model. In the team-level analysis, we use average hometown proximity across the team's five most active players, weighted by the proportion of minutes that each player played.

**Leadership Change.** Leadership change is measured by a dummy variable that captures involuntary coaching changes during players' college careers. Involuntary head coaching changes almost always involve comprehensive changes in assistant coaches and staff personnel within a college's basketball program. We assign a value of one when there is a coaching change and zero when the coach did not leave. We focused on involuntary departures because they are usually more disruptive than retirements or voluntary job changes. In the team level analysis, we use a binary indicator of involuntary leadership change in the year before the year of observation where a value of one indicates a change. Increasing the window of the lagged leadership change variable in the team level analysis does not increase the explanatory power of the model.

**Control Variables.** We control for players' a priori abilities by including a variable that captures a player's rank among all high school players, using rankings by two of the most highly regarded high school basketball scouts (Dave Telep of the Scout Network and the Prep Stars Network). Because of the limited number of players drafted each year, the relationship between high school rank and the likelihood of being drafted is unlikely to be linear. Therefore, we also include a variable equal to high school ranking squared. These higher order transformations are omitted in the final model because

their inclusion does not significantly increase the explanatory power of the model. For the team-level analysis, the specific rank of most players is not available; however, the Scout Network and the Rivals Network do rank most players on a one-to-five scale. Therefore, we used a weighted average rating of the top-five players on each team.

Because high school classes vary in quality and in the competition they face from international players and players not ranked in the top 100, dummy variables for the high school classes of 2002–2005 control for differences across those classes. The high school class of 2006 serves as the comparison group. Moreover, because the needs of NBA teams and the qualities of NBA draft classes can vary across years, we initially included a set of draft year dummy variables in an exploratory Heckman-corrected regression on players' draft positions. However, we found that their inclusion does not substantially alter the results.

We control for the on-court position of each player according to the Scout Network with a set of dummy variables to account for players' differing physical attributes and skill sets, which vary according to on-court position (point guard, center, power forward, wing forward, and wing guard). We also include a set of variables to control for other advantages: a dummy variable that indicates whether a player spent a fifth year in high school, and a variable equal to each player's height in inches. To improve player comparability in the regression on PER, we include a measure of teams' level of competition by using the Sagarin team strength of schedule ratings, which takes into account the strength of opponents and the locations where those opponents were played (Sagarin, 2011). A unreported robustness test indicates that including a control variable for team performance—Sagarin ratings—in the regressions on individual performance does not substantially alter the results of the hypothesis tests.

For the team-level analysis, we include a control variable equal to the games played as well as a variable that captures the interaction between high school rank and game experience. We also include team dummy variables to control for nonindependence of teams across years. Due to limitations in statistical power, we incrementally removed the least explanatory team dummy variables until the model's adjusted R-square statistic was maximized.

## Results

Tables 1, 2 and 3 summarize the descriptive statistics and correlations among the study's variables. Table 1 describes the uncensored sample used for the logistic regression on the probability of being drafted. Table 2 describes the censored sample used for the Heckman-corrected regression on draft position. Table 3 describes the sample used for ordinary least squares regression on team performance.

Hypotheses 1 predicts a direct effect of hometown proximity on recruit and team performance. The coefficient on the distance variable in Model 2 of Table 4 indicates that playing close to home significantly increases a player's likelihood of being drafted into the NBA ( $p < .05$ ), and Model 2 explains significantly more variance than Model 1 ( $p < .05$ ). Results of the Heckman-corrected regression on predicted draft number (Model 2 of Table 5) demonstrate a similar direct relationship between hometown proximity and draft order, but the coefficient is only marginally significant ( $p < .20$ ). The coefficient on the distance variable in Model 2 of Table 6 indicates that playing close to home significantly increases a player's in-game efficiency rating ( $p < .10$ ). Model 1 of Table 7 indicates that the average distance of players from their home has a significant negative influence on team performance. Therefore, hypothesis 1, theorizing a significant, positive influence of proximity on performance, is partially supported at the individual level and fully supported at the team level.

Hypothesis 2 predicts that the influence of hometown proximity on recruit and team performance is contingent upon the stability of an organization's leadership. The hypothesis predicts that the advantage a basketball player gets from playing close to home is weakened by an involuntary coaching change during the player's college career. The coefficient on the distance-coaching change interaction variable in Model 3 of Table 4 indicates that a coaching change significantly reduces the positive effects of proximity on the likelihood of being drafted into the NBA ( $p < .05$ ). Likewise the coefficient on the distance-coaching change interaction term in Model 3 of Table 5 indicates that a coaching change significantly reduces the positive effects of proximity on players' draft positions ( $p < .05$ ). The coefficient on the distance-coaching change interaction term in the regression on player efficiency rating (Model 3 of Table 6) also supports hypothesis 2 ( $p < .10$ ). At the team level, the interactive effect on performance is not significant (Model 2 of Table 7). Overall, the analysis supports hypothesis 2 that leadership change moderates the positive influence of proximity at the individual level, but not at the team level.

Figures 1, 2 and 3 illustrate the results predicted by hypothesis 2. Specifically, Figure 1 illustrates how proximity and coaching change interact to influence the probability of being drafted. Figure 2 illustrates how proximity and coaching change interact to influence player's draft positions. Figure 3 illustrates how proximity and coaching change interact to influence player efficiency ratings. All three figures consistently demonstrate the moderating effects of involuntary coaching change. In each case, involuntary coaching change appears to reduce the positive effects of hometown proximity and possibly increase the negative effects. Results beyond the intersections of the trend lines in each figure (i.e., players that play for universities that are more than 1,000 miles from their hometown) should be interpreted with caution due to a lack of data.

Table 1 Correlations and Descriptive Statistics (Uncensored Sample)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Drafted into NBA	1.00																
2. Player Efficiency Rating	0.45	1.00															
3. Log10(Distance)	-0.11	-0.07	1.00														
4. Leadership Change	-0.08	-0.03	0.04	1.00													
5. Strength of Schedule	0.17	0.19	0.07	-0.12	1.00												
6. High School Rank	-0.38	-0.29	-0.03	0.10	-0.27	1.00											
7. 5 Years of High School	0.04	0.05	0.07	0.00	-0.14	0.05	1.00										
8. Height (inches)	0.05	0.22	0.04	-0.06	0.02	-0.06	-0.01	1.00									
9. Center	-0.06	0.10	0.06	0.04	-0.03	0.02	0.04	0.55	1.00								
10. Power Forward	0.05	0.17	-0.10	-0.11	0.05	-0.05	-0.04	0.42	-0.17	1.00							
11. Wing Forward	0.12	0.10	0.07	-0.02	0.09	-0.09	0.00	0.12	-0.21	-0.19	1.00						
12. Wing Guard	-0.01	-0.14	0.02	0.12	-0.04	0.05	-0.08	-0.33	-0.24	-0.33	-0.22	1.00					
13. Point Guard	-0.03	-0.14	-0.01	-0.02	-0.04	0.05	0.04	-0.69	-0.22	-0.31	-0.26	-0.16	1.00				
14. Class of 2002	0.05	0.15	-0.08	0.14	-0.04	0.02	0.00	-0.07	0.01	-0.08	-0.01	0.03	0.05	1.00			
15. Class of 2003	-0.01	-0.04	-0.01	0.08	-0.09	-0.01	0.01	0.01	0.04	-0.05	-0.03	0.01	-0.03	-0.26	1.00		
16. Class of 2004	0.03	-0.07	0.01	0.00	0.09	0.06	-0.08	-0.04	-0.04	0.04	-0.04	0.03	0.03	-0.28	-0.24	1.00	
17. Class of 2005	-0.08	-0.03	0.06	-0.05	-0.01	0.00	0.14	0.02	-0.10	0.06	0.08	-0.03	-0.04	-0.25	-0.21	-0.22	1.00
Mean	0.28	19.77	2.32	0.17	78.44	44.71	0.09	77.74	0.15	0.25	0.20	0.25	0.22	0.23	0.19	0.20	0.17
Standard Deviation	0.45	6.10	0.77	0.37	1.67	23.61	0.29	3.34	0.36	0.43	0.40	0.43	0.41	0.42	0.39	0.40	0.37
Minimum	0.00	-10.00	0.30	0.00	66.96	1.00	0.00	67.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Maximum	1.00	33.70	3.61	1.00	80.62	93.50	1.00	87.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

Correlations with absolute values greater than 0.11 are significant at  $p < 0.05$ . $N = 335$  (332 for Player Efficiency Rating correlations)

**Table 2 Correlations and Descriptive Statistics (Censored Sample)**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Number Drafted	1.00															
2. Log10(Distance)	-0.03	1.00														
3. Leadership Change	0.06	0.17	1.00													
4. Strength of Schedule	-0.12	0.20	0.10	1.00												
6. High School Rank	0.36	0.05	0.03	-0.31	1.00											
7. 5 Years of High School	-0.02	0.08	-0.02	-0.13	0.20	1.00										
8. Height (inches)	-0.10	-0.04	-0.04	-0.13	-0.05	0.00	1.00									
9. Center	-0.08	-0.03	0.18	-0.11	0.13	-0.13	0.44	1.00								
10. Power Forward	-0.03	-0.09	-0.09	-0.02	-0.15	0.01	0.50	-0.09	1.00							
11. Wing Forward	-0.04	0.16	-0.08	0.17	-0.07	0.17	0.13	-0.23	-0.24	1.00						
12. Wing Guard	0.12	0.01	0.11	-0.06	0.04	-0.19	-0.30	-0.20	-0.36	-0.18	1.00					
13. Point Guard	-0.07	0.03	-0.01	0.09	0.08	0.01	-0.76	-0.18	-0.31	-0.31	-0.08	1.00				
14. Class of 2002	-0.11	0.16	0.38	0.19	0.09	-0.13	-0.02	0.08	-0.17	0.00	0.12	0.01	1.00			
15. Class of 2003	0.11	-0.21	-0.17	-0.11	0.13	0.11	-0.04	-0.09	0.00	0.08	-0.13	-0.02	-0.29	1.00		
16. Class of 2004	0.21	-0.08	0.05	-0.06	0.06	-0.01	-0.13	-0.03	0.07	-0.21	0.08	0.14	-0.32	-0.25	1.00	
17. Class of 2005	0.09	0.06	-0.13	-0.06	-0.11	0.20	0.09	-0.13	0.06	0.14	-0.05	-0.18	-0.22	-0.17	-0.19	1.00
Mean	26.00	2.19	0.12	78.88	30.20	0.11	78.03	0.12	0.29	0.28	0.24	0.19	0.27	0.18	0.22	0.12
Standard Deviation	16.58	0.85	0.32	1.00	23.64	0.31	3.28	0.32	0.46	0.45	0.43	0.40	0.45	0.39	0.41	0.32
Minimum	1.00	0.30	0.00	75.70	1.00	0.00	70.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Maximum	58.00	3.46	1.00	80.62	93.50	1.00	83.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

Correlations with absolute values greater than 0.19 are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

$N = 100$



**Table 3 Correlations and Descriptive Statistics (Team Sample)**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1 Sagarin Rating	1.00				
2 Leadership Change	-0.21	1.00			
3 Log10(Distance)	0.03	-0.06	1.00		
4 High School Rating	0.48	-0.15	-0.04	1.00	
5 Games Played	0.45	-0.10	0.02	0.08	1.00
Mean	83.68	0.08	2.45	3.58	408.18
Standard Deviation	5.37	0.27	0.37	0.53	89.83
Minimum	68.11	0.00	0.95	2.21	184.00
Maximum	98.67	1.00	3.22	4.90	634.00

Correlations with absolute values greater than 0.10 are significant at  $p < 0.01$

$N = 300$

**Table 4 Logistic Regression on the Probability of Being Drafted**

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3				
	Beta	s.e.	Beta	s.e.	Beta	s.e.			
Log10(Distance) x Leadership Change					1.46	*	0.69		
Log10(Distance in Miles)			-0.38	*	0.19	-0.52	**	0.20	
Leadership Change	-0.40	0.43	-0.36		0.43	-3.86	*	1.81	
Strength of Schedule	0.10	0.11	0.13		0.12	0.10		0.11	
Preliminary Rank	-0.12	***	0.03	-0.11	***	0.03	-0.12	***	0.03
Preliminary Rank squared	0.00	***	0.00	0.00	***	0.00	0.00	***	0.00
5 Years of High School	0.73	††	0.49	0.83	†	0.50	0.81	†	0.51
Height (inches)	0.11		0.10	0.13		0.10	0.11		0.10
Center	0.27		0.81	0.29		0.81	0.22		0.83
Power Forward	1.00	††	0.67	0.93	††	0.67	0.80		0.69
Wing Forward	1.42	*	0.64	1.49	*	0.64	1.48	*	0.65
Wing Guard	1.17	†	0.61	1.23	*	0.61	1.07	†	0.62
Point Guard	1.39	†	0.73	1.49	*	0.74	1.34	†	0.74
Class of 2002	0.16		0.42	0.10		0.42	0.10		0.42
Class of 2003	-0.06		0.45	-0.09		0.46	-0.14		0.47
Class of 2004	0.24		0.42	0.25		0.42	0.26		0.43
Class of 2005	-0.67	††	0.49	-0.67	††	0.50	-0.64		0.50
Constant	-15.57	††	11.99	-18.16		12.36	-14.45		12.34
Chi-square (df)	87.21	***	(15)	91.28	***	(16)	97.06	***	(17)
Chi-square Change				4.07	*		5.78	*	

Two-sided significance tests

\* $p < 0.05$

\*\* $p < 0.01$

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$

† $p < 0.10$

†† $p < 0.20$

$N = 335$

**Table 5 Heckman Corrected Regression on Reverse Draft Order**

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3						
	Beta	s.e.	Beta	s.e.	Beta	s.e.					
Log10(Distance) x Leadership Change					32.04	*	17.98				
Log10(Distance in Miles)			-2.65	††	2.76		-5.11	†	3.92		
Leadership Change	-5.11		5.25		-4.77		5.56		-87.81	*	47.20
Preliminary Rank	-0.65	††	0.40		-0.99	†	0.54		-1.57	*	0.77
Preliminary Rank squared	0.00		0.00		0.01		0.00		0.01	††	0.01
5 Years of High School	10.06	†	5.72		12.17	†	6.46		15.50	†	8.35
Height (inches)	2.85	**	1.00		3.26	**	1.14		3.56	*	1.42
Wing Forward	6.40	††	4.37		9.58	†	5.72		13.47	†	7.72
Wing Guard	7.42	††	5.11		9.52	†	5.86		12.35	††	7.95
Point Guard	25.06	**	8.13		28.26	**	9.15		32.35	**	11.46
Class of 2002	6.93	†	3.83		7.25	†	4.11		7.33	††	5.13
Class of 2005	-5.88		-5.62		-7.69		6.22		-10.17	††	7.87
Constant	-188.19	*	81.63		-216.52	*	90.96		-235.32	*	112.89
Wald Chi-square (d.f.)	82.52	***	(20)		83.71	***	(22)		81.37	***	(24)

One-sided significance tests

\*p < 0.05

\*\*p < 0.01

\*\*\*p < 0.001

†p < 0.10

††p < 0.20

N = 335 (100 uncensored)

## Discussion

Prompted by the growing geographic and demographic dispersion of organizations' recruiting efforts, we explore the relationship between recruit hometown proximity and performance at the individual and team levels. The broader literatures on agglomeration, interpersonal proximity, and consumer behavior highlight the importance of spatial proximity in shaping economic behavior (Barnlund & Harland, 1963, Fayard & Weeks, 2007; Hotelling, 1929; Marshall, 1920, McCann & Folta, 2008; Whittington et al., 2009). The sport management and economics literature highlights the way that collegiate recruits are more likely to choose local universities (Dumond et al., 2007), and the way that teams and individual athletes tend to enjoy a "home court" advantage during competition (Bray & Martin, 2003). In this study, we extend these literatures and explore the influence of geographic proximity on the cross-level employee-organization relationship. By testing these relationships in the context of collegiate basketball recruits, we explore an important and unaddressed topic in the sports management and recruitment source literatures that may hold implications for other settings as well.

Our study's results clarify and extend the findings of previous research on proximity by demonstrating

that hometown proximity can have a positive influence on human resource performance at the individual and team levels. We also find that the direct positive effects at the individual level are moderated by the stability of the organization's leadership structure. When leadership involuntarily changes, the positive effect of proximity on individual recruit performance disappears and possibly turns negative.

The contingency inherent in these results is consistent with the results of research linking mechanisms of embeddedness to recruit performance. Leadership stability plays a pivotal role in the way that these mechanisms manifest themselves in the relationship between the organization and its human resources. Our results indicate that when the leaders who shape the organization's strategy and character involuntarily leave, the additional social conduits provided by proximity cannot transfer relevant knowledge, foster trust nor promote motivating social commitment. Moreover, in the context of transitioning leadership, potential negative influences of maintaining strong extraorganizational ties can become stronger. For example, without a strong, stable leader, an organization's local members may turn their attention to family or friends who can be distracting and who may be poor guides for what is wanted by a new leader. In addition, removal of a trusted, well-liked leader may foster resentment among

**Table 6 OLS Regression on Player Efficiency Rating**

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Beta	s.e.	Beta	s.e.	Beta	s.e.
Log10(Distance) x Leadership Change					1.63	† 1.122
Log10(Distance in Miles)			-0.57	† 0.41	-0.78	* .437
Leadership Change	0.15	0.86	0.24	0.86	-3.62	† 2.792
Strength of Schedule	0.26	0.21	0.28	†† 0.21	0.26	.208
Preliminary Rank	-0.24	*** 0.05	-0.24	*** 0.05	-0.24	*** .054
Preliminary Rank squared	0.00	*** 0.00	0.00	*** 0.00	0.00	*** .001
5 Years of High School	1.56	†† 1.10	1.70	†† 1.10	1.63	†† 1.099
Height (inches)	0.06	0.21	0.09	0.21	0.07	.209
Center	3.68	* 1.77	3.71	* 1.76	3.66	* 1.761
Power Forward	3.64	* 1.47	3.60	* 1.46	3.48	* 1.463
Wing Forward	2.79	* 1.39	2.94	* 1.39	2.91	* 1.390
Wing Guard	1.25	1.36	1.40	1.37	1.23	1.368
Point Guard	1.39	1.61	1.59	1.62	1.44	1.617
Class of 2002	2.74	** 0.93	2.65	** 0.93	2.64	** .932
Class of 2003	0.57	0.99	0.53	0.98	0.49	.983
Class of 2004	0.16	0.95	0.15	0.95	0.18	.949
Class of 2005	0.62	1.036	0.63	1.02	0.67	1.023
Constant	-3.30	24.12	-6.08	24.17	-2.34	24.263
R-square (df)	0.21	*** (15)	0.22	*** (16)	0.23	*** (17)
R-square change			0.01	††	0.01	††

One-sided significance tests

\*p < 0.05

\*\*p < 0.01

\*\*\*p < 0.001

†p < 0.10

††p < 0.20

N = 332

former followers. By testing our hypotheses in a setting where we measure this stability, this study takes significant strides toward developing a more nuanced model of proximity's influences on performance.

This study does not replicate the moderating effect of coaching change at the team level. It is possible that the moderating effects of involuntary leadership change do not translate to the team level; however, we cannot rule out the possibility that roster changes or other sources of statistical noise obscure more nuanced relationships among the constructs. Future research at the team level is warranted.

### Possible Mediators

One obvious issue that needs further discussion is the fact that while we propose that the mechanisms of embeddedness—learning, trust and commitment—function as

mediators between proximity and performance (Barden & Mitchell, 2007), we did not measure these factors directly. However, we did conduct a set of ten 20–60 min semistructured interviews with current and former collegiate basketball players. Three are Division I head coaches. Three were drafted into the NBA. One is an NBA scout. Although we cannot draw strong scientific conclusions from the interviews themselves, they do offer valuable insights into the plausibility and nuances of our theoretical explanation when interpreted in conjunction with the results of the quantitative study.

We asked about the recruiting process and probed with subsequent questions about how proximity specifically influenced the recruit's decision of where to play and their motivation and performance. The interviews were taped recorded and content analyzed. We simply recorded whether there were comments that suggested that each of our three mechanisms (learning, trust, commitment)

**Table 7 OLS Regression on Team Performance (Sagarin Rating)**

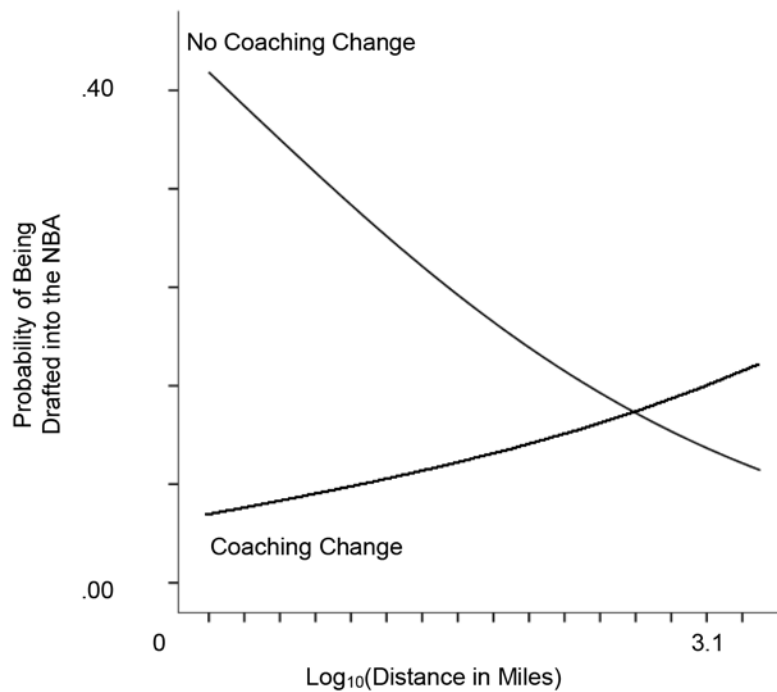
Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Beta		s.e.	Beta		s.e.	Beta		s.e.
Log10(Distance) x Leadership Change							0.75		1.93
Log10(Distance)				-1.55	*	0.77	-1.63	*	0.80
Leadership Change	-1.56	†	0.83	-1.70	*	0.83	3.49		4.65
High School Rating	4.52	***	1.21	4.27	***	1.21	4.28	***	1.21
Games Played	0.04	***	0.01	0.04	***	0.01	0.04	***	0.01
Rating x Games Played	-0.03	*	0.01	-0.03	*	0.01	-0.03	*	0.01
Team dummies	Included			Included			Included		
(Constant)	57.89	***	4.49	62.66	***	5.05	62.79	***	5.07
R-square (df)	0.59	***	(33)	0.60	***	(34)	0.60	***	(35)
R-square change				0.01	*		0.00		
Two-sided significance tests									

\* p < 0.05

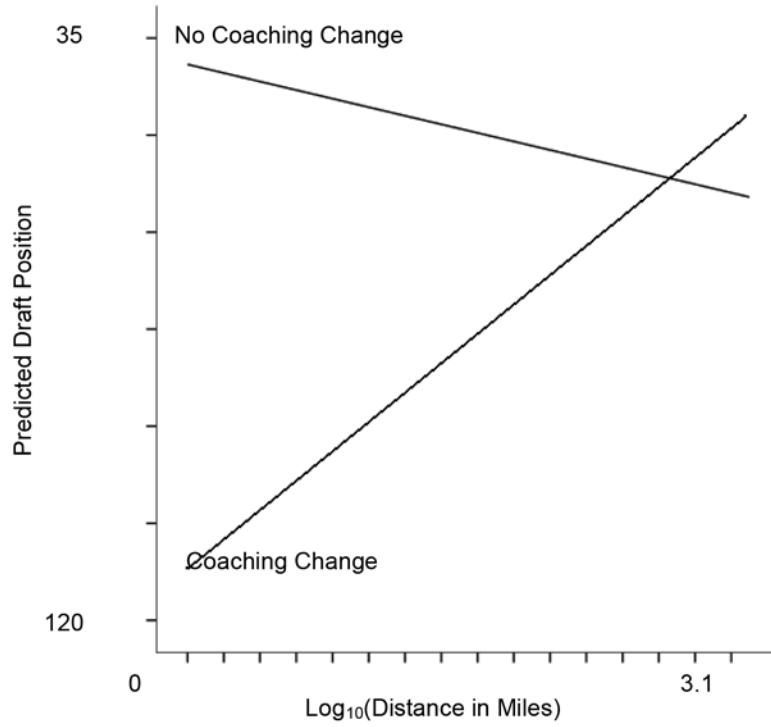
\*\*\* p < 0.001

†p < 0.10

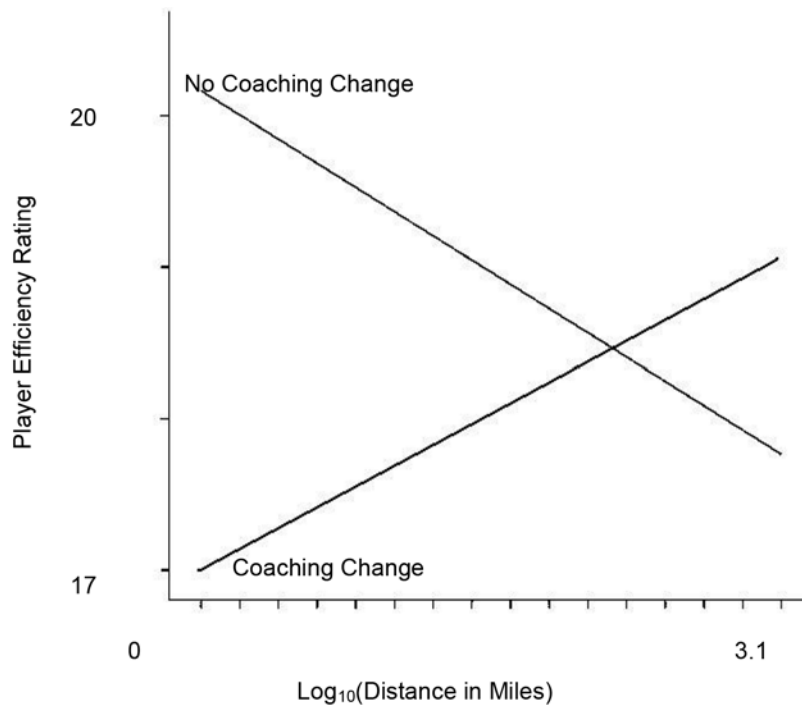
n = 30



**Figure 1** Proximity, leadership change and performance of collegiate basketball recruits.



**Figure 2** Proximity, leadership change and performance of collegiate basketball recruits.



**Figure 3** Proximity, leadership change and performance of collegiate basketball recruits.

were more positive for local or distant recruits. There was substantial agreement among two authors who evaluated each interview.

On the learning dimension we had 9 of 10 interviewees mention this factor as helping local recruits. Local players said things like “I always knew what they were doing” and “I felt like I had a little advantage”. Both coaches and players mentioned it was easier to acquire information and coaching tendencies for a local player. For the trust dimension, all of the respondents mentioned it as a positive factor. One player said, “I built a relationship with a local college coach starting in seventh grade”. A coach said that local recruits base their trust on establishing a relationship early while that was hard for distant recruits “because the relationship is basically built on phone contact”. Nine of ten interviewees mentioned commitment. Knowing the coach and the player community (past and current players, assistant coaches) was cited frequently as highly motivating. One local player said, “This is what I’m playing for. I’ve got all of these fans behind me.”

In sum, these exploratory interviews suggest that knowledge, trust and commitment, as engendered by a coach, his staff and players, may have a positive influence on recruit motivation and performance.

### Practical Implications

This study’s results should not be interpreted as a categorical recommendation for recruits to always stay close to home. Nor does it suggest that recruiters should only select from local players. From the player’s perspective, other factors such as leadership quality, advancement opportunities, and quality education could be more important. However, in situations where other considerations make options seem roughly equivalent, the choice to attend and play basketball at a university nearer to home appears to be most beneficial to the player as long as there appears to be stability in the coaching staff.

From the perspective of coaches and recruiters, the phenomenon of home court advantage is well known and has been empirically established in the sport management literature (Courneya & Carron, 1992; Mizruchi, 1985; Schwartz & Barsky, 1977). At least part of this effect can be attributed to a higher level of confidence and motivation felt when playing at home (Jurkovic, 1983; Bray & Martin, 2003). Our study of recruits’ hometown proximity adds a new conceptual element to the home court advantage literature. The study also affirms distinctive efforts by sports organizations to identify and develop local talent. For example, the Atlanta Braves organization spends considerable resources on supporting and scouting youth baseball organizations in the greater Atlanta area. These scouting and community-building investments give the Braves asymmetric insights into the talent and character of local recruits, and these insights are reflected in the success of the Braves’ recent draft picks (e.g., Brian McCann, Jason Heyward). Coach Lorenzo Romar and the Washington Huskies basketball program have had similar successes in harvesting underrated talent

from the greater Seattle area (e.g., Brandon Roy, Isaiah Thomas). Interestingly, both organizations have enjoyed a high level of leadership stability and consistently strong performance relative to their competitors in recent years. Consequently, each of these organizations could represent a useful example of human resource strategies that successfully leverage recruits’ social embeddedness and leadership stability to create sustainable advantage.

### Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of this research is the use of a single context—NCAA Division I Men’s basketball recruits—to test the effects of human resource proximity. Multiple differences between the collegiate basketball context and other settings raise questions about the generalizability of the results. For example, hometown proximity may be more influential on young collegiate athletes, who might have greater need of local community support, than on other kinds of recruits. Also unlike most other professional recruits, collegiate basketball players have only four years of eligibility. The short-term influence of hometown proximity may diminish as employees integrate into their community. The nature of leadership across contexts might also be significantly different. In collegiate basketball, coaches lead the recruiting process and that gives them an opportunity to develop relatively strong relationships with recruits before recruits joining the organization. Consequently, the involuntary removal of a coach might be more disruptive in collegiate basketball than in other settings.

On the other hand, collegiate basketball also shares some fundamental similarities with other contexts. Generally, sports organizations can be viewed as a model for other types of business organizations (Berman, Down & Hill, 2002; Keidel, 1984), as the “world of sports mirrors the world of work” (Keidel, 1987, p. 591). Several management research topics relevant to our discussion on hometown proximity have been tested in sports contexts and generalized to business settings, including recruiting fit (Wright, Smart & McMahan, 1995), knowledge (Berman et al., 2002), trust (Elsass, 2001), and leader influence (Barden & Mitchell, 2007). Moreover, successful management of new recruits is critical to the renewal of both collegiate sports programs and other professional organizations (O’Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000; Hatch & Dyer, 2004). Specifically, like many professional recruits, collegiate basketball recruits experience high levels of intense training, competition, pressure, scrutiny, long hours, and time spent away from home (Waldrop, 2008). NCAA rules do permit coaches to end athletes’ scholarship support in any given year. In addition, research on leaders and recruiting in other contexts suggests that direct supervisors are also often heavily involved in the recruiting process (Liden et al., 1997) and rapidly develop very strong relations with subordinates (Nahrgang et al., 2009). Consequently, the relevance of this study’s findings to recruits in other fields, including noncollegiate basketball sports, law, medicine, engineering, academia,

and entertainment, should be considered. Future research should explore the relationships found in this paper in other organizations including business settings.

Future research should also examine the role of other types of individual differences (Rynes, 1991). For example, psychological states might moderate the influence of hometown proximity (Totterdell, 2000). Social and philosophical dispositions could also moderate the influence of hometown proximity. Both head coaches we interviewed described what we call a *mercenary effect*. Some players, many born outside of the United States, seem to be more willing to play far from home and to be less influenced—positively or negatively—by their environment. The coaches suggested that this might be true because some players are more task-oriented. One former player we interviewed described taking his playing career with a grain of salt because the academic prestige and nonbasketball opportunities offered by his university were a primary determinant in his choice. One of the head coaches also indicated that players vary in valuing close relations in their home communities, and noted that players who grow up in difficult circumstances can sometimes benefit by joining programs sufficiently far from home. Moreover, recruits who place the highest value on close personal relations and tend to join local organizations may also, on average, be more influenced by leadership changes than nonlocal players are.

Another limitation of our research is that the mechanisms by which we theorize proximity influences performance—learning, trust, and commitment—were not directly empirically tested. Future research should conduct a more thorough analysis of these mediating mechanisms. For example, a study could directly measure the structure and content of relations among employees, organizations and the local community. Focusing on learning, trust and commitment in the model can test the relative influences of these mechanisms. The results of such research could help potential recruits make informed decisions about the importance of “staying home” for school, sports, or work, and inform organizations about whether to recruit and hire locally.

Future research should also consider a potential interaction between home court advantage and recruit hometown proximity. Of the mechanisms theorized, social commitment might be especially salient when playing a home game compared with an away game, as proximate friends and family are more likely to attend the game. Therefore, players who benefit from proximity may be more positively influenced in their psychological state in a home game with location, familiarity, and crowd support advantages (Courney & Carron, 1992; Nevill & Holder, 1999).

## Conclusion

In sum, this study expands our understanding of a central influence on student-athlete performance, namely, the role of hometown proximity. Specifically, we find that proximity and involuntary changes in leadership

interactively affect individual performance. While tested in a collegiate sports context, we argue that the conceptual arguments and results likely generalize to a number of organizational settings. Looking forward, we hope this study encourages others to explore the deeper nuances of the roles of proximity and leadership as we develop additional directions for fruitful research into recruit performance. We also hope that this study generally encourages greater interaction among scholars in sport management, strategic management, and human resource management domains.

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